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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Leeward Community College (Hawaii) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. Working as a team, faculty members examined the multi-cultural groups in the local communities by expanding the curriculum in two existing core courses: an American History course and an American Studies course. Videotaped co-curricular panel presentations and activities by community leaders and locally available experts supplemented perspectives presented in the classrooms. Each co-curricular session elucidated one of the goals of the project. Receptions held after the sessions set an informal tone for the audience and speakers to continue the discussion. Students followed up the session with in-class discussions and journal reactions to ensure a broad range of reflective responses. The line-up of sessions featured a strong agenda of speakers and qualified moderators. Topics included: (1) "Labor Unions and the Coalescence of Community: 1946 Sugar Strike"; (2) "What Hawaiian Sovereignty Means to Non-Hawaiians"; (3) "Localism and the Late Arrivals: The Samoan Community"; (4) "Rediscovery of Community: Old Pearl City Walking Tour"; and (5) "Post Modern Economic Change: Waipahu Bounces Back." A learning community seminar has been proposed to help institutionalize the project. Obstacles included a book that was too difficult for many of the students and a lack of publicity. (HAA)

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University of Hawaii Leeward Community College Exploring America's Communities Progress Report

Hawaii University, Honolulu
Leeward Community College

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In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
(New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997)

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UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I

LEEWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Office of the Dean of Instruction

Exploring America's Communities: In Quest of Common Ground

Leeward Community College was established in the Fall of 1968 to serve the Leeward coast and Central O'ahu districts. It is located between the Pearl City and Waipahu communities. Situated on approximately 49 acres of mildly sloping land, the campus design provides a commanding and magnificent view of Pearl Harbor. Between 5500-6000 students are enrolled each semester in liberal arts and vocational education programs offered on campus and at an off-campus installation in one of the rural communities. Three thousand seven hundred forty (63%) of the students were self identified as being of Asian/Pacific Islander heritage.

A joint project in 1993-94 with Pearl City High School that was funded by a $9,500 grant from the Hawai'i Committee for the Humanities inspired the College's participation in the *Exploring America's Communities* project. We considered the high school's oral history project to be a natural partner for collaboration with Leeward Community College's "Hawaiian Style Theater" course. A $12,000 grant from the State Foundation for Culture and the Arts supported our drama students' efforts to artistically interpret the oral history materials for presentation to the general community.

The success of this project inspired the College to expand its focus to include Waipahu, as well as Pearl City and seek a slot as one of the campuses involved in the *Exploring America's Communities* project. Working as a team, Donald Thomson (Professor CC in American Studies and Sociology), Patricia Kennedy (Assistant Professor CC in History), and Douglas Dykstra (Acting Curriculum Specialist and project director) examined the multi-cultural strands in the communities by curriculum infusion in two existing core courses, Kennedy's *American History 282* and Thomson's *American Studies 211*. Videotaped co-curricular panel presentations and activities by community leaders and locally available experts supplemented perspectives presented in the classrooms.

Each co-curricular session elucidated one of the goals of the project. Receptions held after the sessions set an informal tone for audience and speakers to continue the discussion. Students followed up the sessions with in-class discussions and journal reactions to ensure a broad range of reflective responses. The line-up of sessions featured a strong agenda of speakers and qualified moderators. Topics were as follows:

1. **Labor Unions & the Coalescence of Community: 1946 Sugar Strike**

This session emphasized the forces that built community solidarity in Waipahu and throughout the Territory of Hawai'i among disparate ethnic groups of workers. Striker solidarity and logistics under the

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leadership of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union opened the door to middle class aspirations for agricultural laborers. A "deal me in" mentality took hold among Hawai'i's working classes as a social revolution paved the way for a subsequent political revolution that propelled the Democratic Party to dominance. Waipahu and Pearl City have been among the strongholds for the Democrats ever since.

Students regarded this as the most successful and informative of the panel discussions. Their responses indicate appreciation for the community building influences of the strike. Moreover, many students considered the session to be a valuable lesson in personal and family histories. Typical of journal entries was:

> *I find it wonderful the way people pulled together and acted together regardless of ethnic backgrounds. A valuable lesson should have been learned and remembered from this strike. People today, though, have forgotten the struggles and forgotten the respect that those people had for one another.*

Student recognition that more than a labor strike was chronicled by the session pleased us. They realized that this event represented an achievement that made possible the capacity for "associated living". Neither ethnic differences nor social differences would divide the community the way they had in an earlier age. The success of the sugar strike made mutual respect and hope for the future common denominators of the majority of people in Hawai'i.

2. What Hawaiian Sovereignty Means to Non-Hawaiians

This session induced project participants to face the issue that American community has damaged indigenous communities. This is especially true in Hawai'i as the only American state to once have been an internationally recognized sovereign kingdom. For us, the question of forces that bring us together is more than an academic exercise.

The sovereignty advocates stunned the audience with their diametrically opposing outlooks on the future of sovereignty and the role of non-Hawaiians. The tension-suffused hall motivated many students to carry on their discussions informally afterwards. This was the first time that many of the students were exposed to how divisive the issue of sovereignty is in the Hawaiian community.

One speaker described a concept of sovereignty that invited the non-Hawaiians to support the cause as full fledged citizens in an independent Hawai'i. The other speaker envisaged a future for an independent Hawai'i in which only the ethnically Hawaiian (Kanaka Maoli) inhabitants would be full citizens. Student response was definitively supportive of a just restitution for Hawaiians that recognizes the rights of all who call Hawai'i home. The call for a Hawai'i made free by and for the Kanaka Maoli triggered responses similar to this one:

> *We cannot turn back the clock, nor do I wish to. I love my non-Hawaiian husband and my part-Hawaiian children. ... If they (Hawaiian sovereignty advocates) can not get along how do they plan on living together?*

Few people question the appropriateness of some measure of restitution because the American

Government's official apology indicates wrongdoing. However, the more racially exclusive options generally shocked the non-Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians alike. Inclusiveness is a part of the creed that appears to be characteristic of community standards that have taken root in the islands.

3. Localism and the Late Arrivals: The Samoan Community

This session explored the stresses that impinge upon immigrants who arrive after a polyglot community has stabilized and developed its pidgin language. Admixtures may not be readily embraced by an established community. The greatest influx of Samoan immigration occurred in Hawai'i after the end of World War II. Although Samoa shares Polynesian cultural traditions with the Hawaiians, the hybridized community of the islands is polyglot not strictly Polynesian now. Samoans have had difficulties gaining acceptance.

Student respondents recognized the challenge facing Samoans as they struggle against stereotypical labels. Student understanding of the value of cultural tolerance and avoiding stereotypical judgments was impressive as in the following conclusion:

> *... I learned a great deal about <u>our</u> local Samoan community. I never knew what the word "Sa moa" meant: Sacred Center says a lot about who they are and what they represent. I do honestly believe that as a society we need to recognize <u>our</u> Samoan community for their accomplishments and not label them or hold them down because they are culturally different.* *(underscoring added)*

Repeatedly the use of the possessive pronoun "our" Samoan community impressed us as a sign of inclusiveness not paternalism. Moreover, it was used to signify links with others as a defining characteristic of the community and we took this as a sign of implicit understanding of the qualities required for "associated living".

4. Rediscovery of Community: Old Pearl City Walking Tour

We sought to inspire students to see that the process of local history research is as important as the product. The significance of process and product as reflected in all facets of this project has impressed us since its inception as a joint oral history project with Pearl City High School. The process employed has created an ever expanding network of institutions and individuals committed to recapturing and reflecting upon the history of the fascinating little community on a peninsula in Pearl Harbor that has now become O'ahu's largest suburb. The product takes the form of oral history transcripts, articles by scholars and professionals, an outstanding pictorial book, and a community college student written script to stage a provocative thematic production set in a local history context.

Students on the walking tour realized that the community of Pearl City was far more intriguing than the strip malls, car dealerships and sub-division grids that dominate the town today. Finding its history by speaking to its veteran residents and listening to the vivid images describing a bygone era gave them an appreciation for the process as a means of reaching out across generations. Real appreciation was apparent as some students remarked

that they could remember their parents talking about some of the events and places described during the walking tour.

5. Post Modern Economic Change: Waipahu Bounces Back

Waipahu provided an outstanding example of a town undergoing the pangs of economic change. The shut down of the sugar economy has threatened the viability of the town. Our speakers recommended keeping the theme of the plantation as the way to maintain the social compact that made Waipahu. The motif will be there even as discount malls and suburban housing developments mushroom on the perepheries of the old town. The amount of planning that is being done to preserve the atmosphere of the old town surprised students.

The extra attention given to Waipahu is understandable given its juxtaposition to Pearl City where the wrenching transformation took place as a result of the war. Consequently no planning was done, nor effort made to preserve continuity with its past because war objectives were more important than community relations.

The final speaker presented the proposition that Waipahu could both preserve old town roots and pursue new developments in associated living with the elderly by following through on its lead as the top site in the state for residential care homes. Preparation for the retirement of baby boomers and keeping the generations integrated in existing communities could go hand in hand as a means of feeding the economy of a town in need of both hope for the future and links to the past.

Community Values Inquiry

The basis for the values inquiry central to this project is the interplay between the individual rights based values and the responsibility based communitarian values that have both been a part of the American heritage. Problems arise in American culture due to the inability to recognize that it is possible and necessary to draw from both value systems simultaneously. The industrial revolution has promoted the individual rights based values, and this has produced a record of modernizing growth that has propelled the country to world leadership while producing a variety of threatening challenges to the concept of community.

The Good Society by Robert Bellah, et. al. was the common text used to induce our students to address the issue of values at the foundation of strong communities. Student discussions and journal entries suggested that the brightest opinion leaders in class understood the significance of communitarian values and the quest for associated living so important to community building as, for instance in the following:

> *A "good society" has a sense of unity and community. ... Society today keeps reverting back to the individual goals and not looking at the "whole picture". ... I think, as we move along our separate ways, we forget to see the whole picture. Each of us does need many other people to get what we as individuals need. There must be a way to come together as a whole, work toward the common good, and satisfy the individual wants.*

This project has created the experiences that have opened new territory and new thoughts to the students involved,

as well as the students from any of the classes that may have recommended our co-curricular events as extra-credit opportunities.

Now that the project is approaching completion, we are preparing to institutionalize it by expanding the network of involved instructors, developing new instructional partnerships and disseminating the tapes of co-curricular sessions to the community. Foremost among the achievements is the proposal to teach a learning community seminar using three professors from the University of Hawai'i at West O'ahu and three from Leeward Community College. They will jointly teach a nine credit seminar as a capstone course for the Associate of Arts degree and as a threshold course for the West O'ahu baccalaureate. Team members, Patricia Kennedy and Donald Thomson will be scheduled to teach during the fall semester 1997 as the link between the project and the proposed learning community. Together, they established a commitment to *Community* as the theme for this endeavor with their West O'ahu colleagues. The University of Hawai'i will support the project with a $21,700 grant from its Educational Improvement Fund.

Finally, no project unfolds exactly as planned and this one was no exception. However, all the obstacles are subject to resolution by taking compensatory measures in the future.

The book by Bellah that was selected to induce students to think about the values of the good society was too theoretical to communicate effectively with our students. Although the brightest of them were able to stay with the challenge and discover the message, most of the students were very discouraged. A book like The End of Work by Jeremy Rifkin could induce thinking about many of the same community values issues in a manner that would be far more accessible to community college students. Our advice would be to read Bellah for yourself and assign Rifkin for your students.

We also did not publicize our activities as much as we might have. None of the team members was particularly inclined to seek external publicity. All of us were produced by an academic culture that encourages achievement rather than seeking recognition for it. However, the support that has been given by the University of Hawai'i's Educational Improvement Fund has been more gratifying than any number of newspaper articles.

We still are working on editing the tapes of the co-curricular sessions to prepare them for broadcast on the public access television station in the spring semester. We have recently finished the script for the voice over narration of the walking tour of the Pearl City old town. This involves coordinating video images, still pictures, narration and background music. These tapes will be with the team in their final form when we arrive in New Orleans. Finally, I must get the letters out to public schools and the sister campuses of the community college system about the availability of the tapes. I have many people who are deserving of heartfelt thanks for all they have done to make this project possible, and those letters will go out in the spring semester.